A PHILANTHROPIC HONEYMOON

BY DOROTHY CANFIELD

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE GIBBS

IT was entirely natural that Henry Peabody of Massachusetts, brought up in the most reasonable and well-regulated of New England households, should fall in love with a tenderly irrational girl of Southern parentage. It was entirely natural that he should tell himself that he loved her all the more for her sweet lack of logic and utter unpracticality. But it was also entirely natural that at the first active manifestation, after their marriage, of this generous ignoring of possibilities, he should stand somewhat aghast.

He had smiled tenderly at her kindly interest in the dumb, awkward stewardess whose ineptness he had remarked with a competent man's dislike of inefficiency.

"What a little angel Agatha is!" he thought to himself afterward, as he paced the deck for a solitary cigar.

The phrase recalled a conversation with Agatha's brother on the day before his wedding. By a reaction as natural as Henry's, Percy had married a plain, practical girl, of whose commonplace virtues he was never tired of talking. Before his sister's wedding he had invited Henry to his comfortable, well-kept home in East Orange, close to his father's, and not far from the house which Henry and Agatha were to occupy. There he had regarded his future brother-in-law with eyes full of a sympathy which Henry had vaguely resented. He had given cloudy hints about Agatha's visionary ideas, and had even, it seemed to the chivalrously alert Henry, been on the point of warning him not to be surprised at any manifestation of them. Henry was indignant.

"As if I didn't know darling Agatha a thousand times better than he! As if I were marrying her to get a housekeeper like his ugly, uninteresting wife!"

The day before the wedding Percy had lingered long over the breakfast-table alone with Henry, evidently trying to say something without offending him. Several times he began.

"You know, Harry, Agatha—well, Agatha is——"

Henry interrupted him firmly, and issued an ultimatum.

"Agatha is an angel, no less!"

For a moment Percy had looked at his future brother-in-law with unfathomable eyes; then he had repeated slowly and enigmatically:

"Yes, Agatha is an angel—no mistake about it!" To which speech he had added incongruously the formula of sym-

pathy between Americans—"Shake, old man!".

Henry had felt instinctively that it would not be loyal to Agatha to take the proffered hand, and Percy had passed over this refusal with a pitying smile.

The little scene came up before Henry, pacing the deck, an infinite expanse of darkness lying about him and an infinite tenderness for his pretty, unworldly Agatha swelling his heart.

"A good thing to get her away from her family—they can't appreciate her," he thought proudly to himself; although Agatha's father was so blindly devoted to her as to make the practical Percy groan.

When his cigar was finished he went into his cabin, to find his bride still up, a vision of blond braids, blue silk, and soft white laces. His bachelor eyes were for a moment dazzled by the pretty show, and he did not notice that Agatha's cheeks were unusually pink and her eyes very shining.

"Oh, Harry darling!" she cried, as he came in. "I've been talking to Greta—she's the stewardess, you know—and she has such a sad history! It makes my heart ache. She just hates this work, indoors in this smelly ship; she says she's always worked out in the fields in one of those lovely Dutch gardens, and she's *so* unhappy here! She loves outdoors, and growing things. It's her cruel brother who made her take this position as stewardess because she could earn more money for him. She learned a little English from an English family when she was a child, so she got the place; but she's half seasick all the time, and so homesick for her vegetables and flowers, poor thing! She cried and cried when she was talking about it."

Agatha's own lovely eyes were suffused with tears of pity as she spoke, and her husband felt as if he were looking at a being too good for this world; but in spite of himself he could not repress an exclamation of dismay as Agatha went on confidently:

"So I just told her that she needn't worry a bit more—that we'd take care of her. I said she could go and tell the captain right now that she'd leave the ship at the end of this journey!"

Henry's head whirled.

"Good heavens, Agatha! What in the world can we do with an ignorant Dutch market-garden woman? Surely you're not thinking of pensioning her for life, are you?"

Agatha closed his mouth with a pretty gesture.

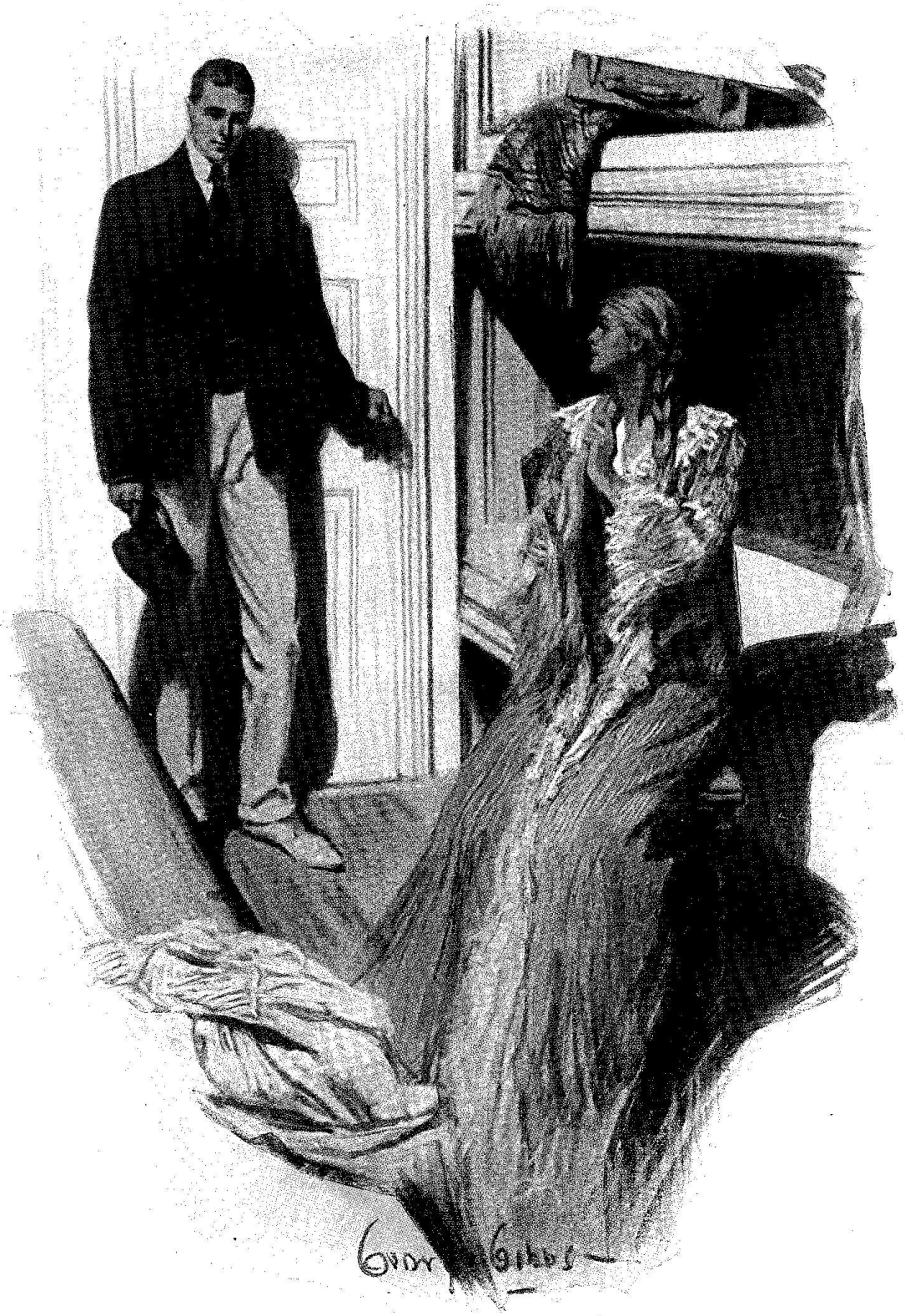
"Hush, practical business man! Wait until I tell you my plan. I suppose you think I haven't one, don't you? Well, now I'll show you what a common-sense wife you have. I've thought it all out. We're going to be abroad just eight weeks, aren't we? Well, Greta says she can live well for three dollars a week. That's twenty-four dollars, isn't it? Then a second-class passage back to America on this line costs forty-four dollars. That makes sixty-eight in all—call it seventy for a margin, as Percy would say. Now, dearest, I know you were planning to buy me something in Paris that would cost as much as that, weren't you? Instead, I'll just take Greta's rescue from unhappiness." She put her white arms around the neck of the astonished young man, and laid her head on his shoulder. Instinctively his arm went about her for an embrace which she took to be assent to her plan. "Oh, aren't you good, dear, dear Harry!"

Dear, dear Harry had, however, as he told himself, not quite lost his head. He sat down on the camp-chair, the only furniture of the cabin, and, taking his wife on his knee, endeavored to reason with her.

"Agatha darling, that is a sweet, lovely thought, but it is quite impossible. It's not the money, though that is quite a sum to throw away, but what under the sun could we do with Greta when she landed in New York? It really wouldn't be for her best interests. She could find nothing for herself, so hopelessly awkward and incompetent as she is."

Agatha interrupted again.

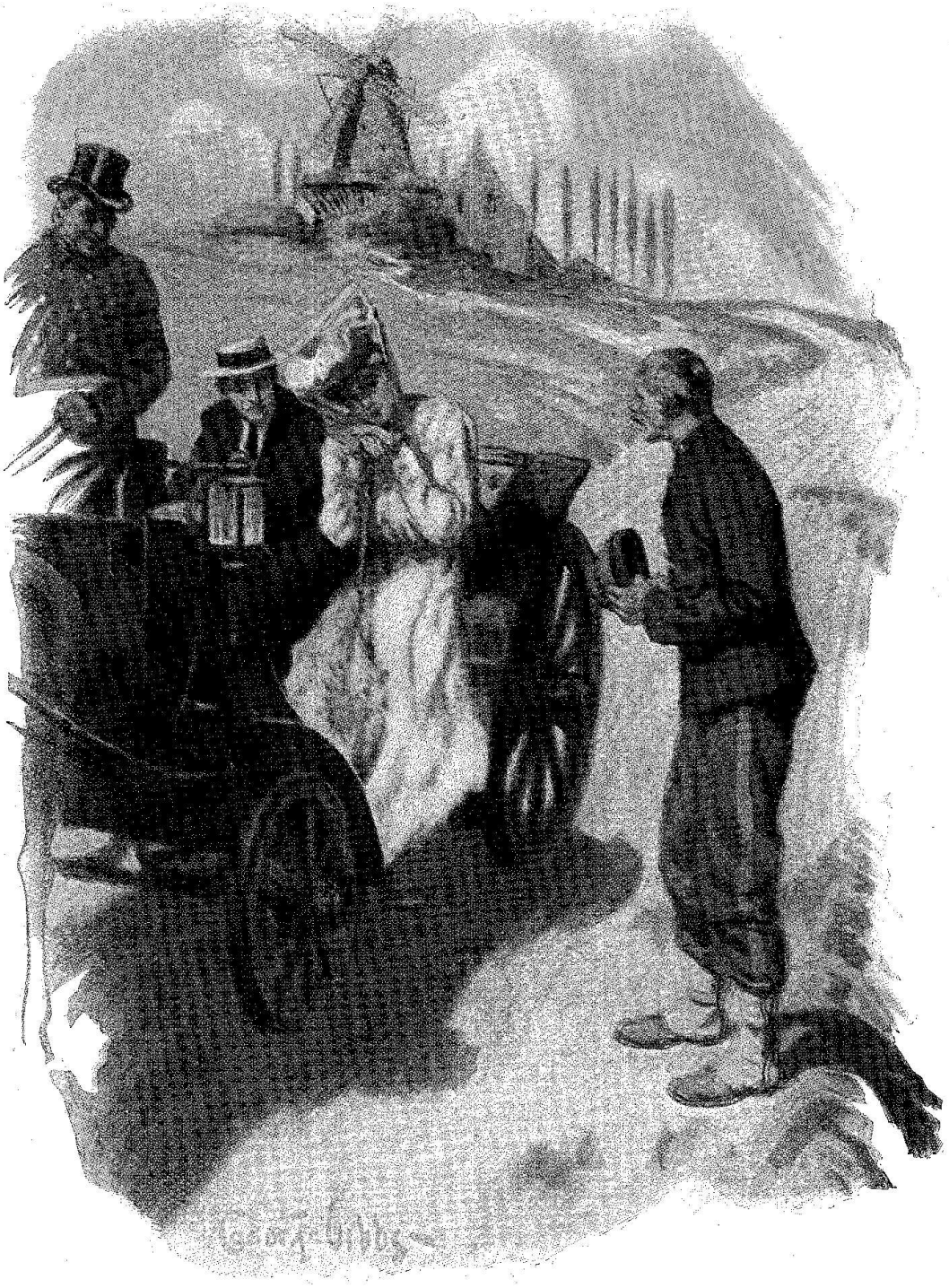
"Do you suppose I haven't thought that all out? I'm not a child. Just think of all the vegetables and flowers that are used in New York! It stands to reason that there must be any number of market-gardens to grow them, and any number of people needed to work in the gardens; and any one with as much influence as you have can surely find a place for one more, just one!"



"I'VE BEEN TALKING TO GRETA—SHE'S THE STEWARDESS, YOU KNOW—AND SHE HAS SUCH A SAD HISTORY!"

Harry gave a despairing gesture.

"Why, dearest, it's just perfectly wild! I don't know any market-gardeners—how should I? And you don't know if a word that this woman has been telling you is true. She may be a consummate



THE LITTLE SOLDIER SOBBED OUT SOME LONG STORY, TO WHICH AGATHA LISTENED

liar. You don't know a thing about her."

Agatha rose, went to the mirror, and began combing her hair in a silence which alarmed the young husband.

"Agatha, darling, you can't really mean that you want to do this crazy thing?"

There was a pause, during which he grew more and more apprehensive, and then from the depths of shining hair came a half sob that went to his heart.

"Oh, Aggie!" he cried, taking her in his arms.

"It's the very first thing I've asked of you since we were married," she said in a sorrowful voice.

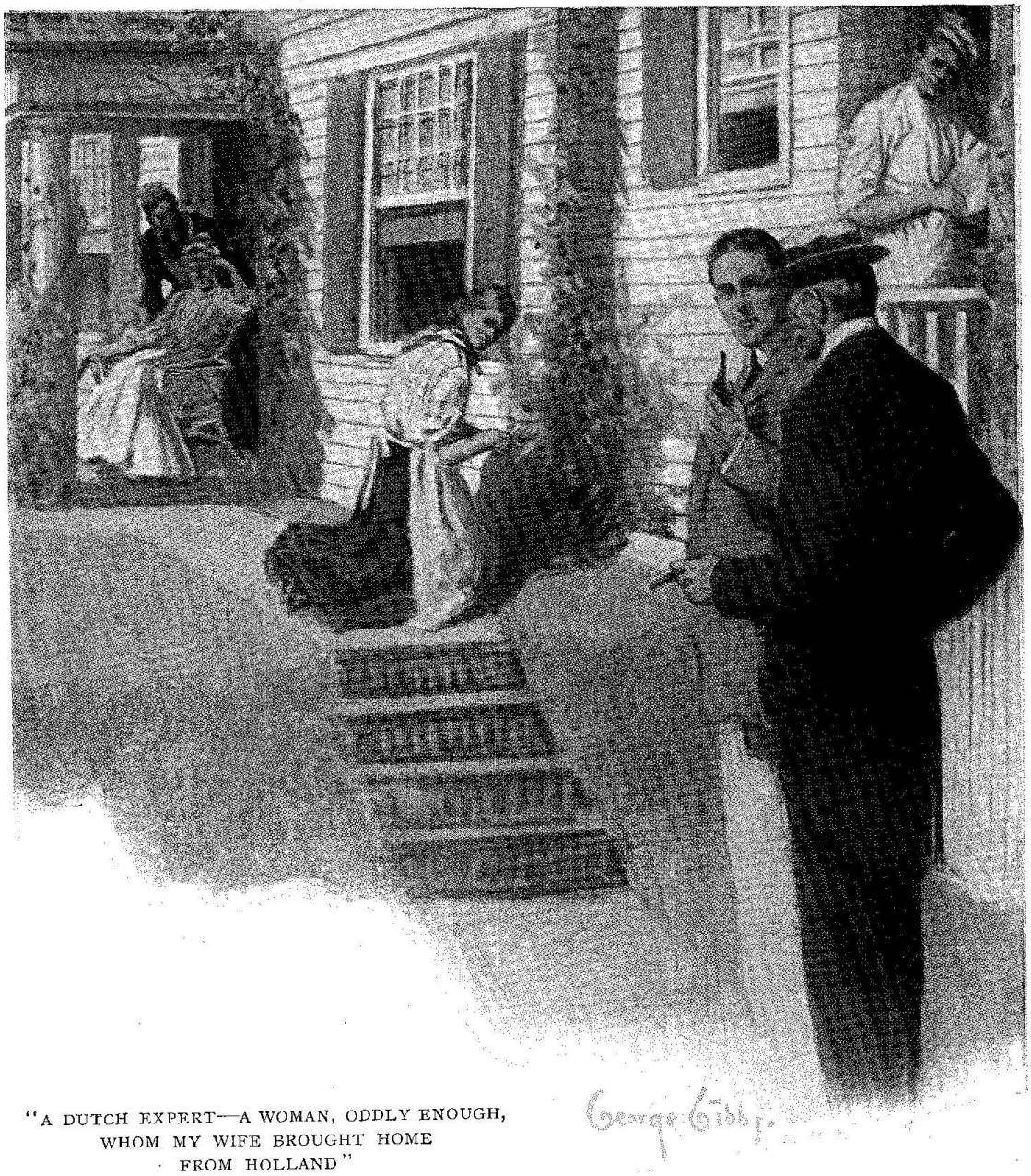
Harry had a sudden revulsion. He felt that he was as bad as Percy.

"You shall have it, dearest! It's a

"FO' DE LAWD'S SAKE, IS YOU AMERICANS?"

noble thing for you to ask, and we will do just what you say."

There was a sudden flash of a rosy face and a pair of moist blue eyes from



"A DUTCH EXPERT—A WOMAN, ODDLY ENOUGH, WHOM MY WIFE BROUGHT HOME FROM HOLLAND"

the golden glory on his shoulder, and he exclaimed again as he had to Percy:

"My Agatha is an angel!"

Even the sight of the squat, ugly Greta, and the thought of how she had imposed on Agatha's unworldliness, could not dash the fervor of his devotion. "What Agatha wanted she should have!" became his motto. It upheld him through the ordeal of leaving the vessel amid the golden rain of tips that Agatha insisted upon showering about them. It sustained him while they took care of a sickly and not too clean baby on the train to The Hague. They had no time to look out of the windows, so absorbed were they in their task. The tired mother had relapsed into a sleep of exhaustion.

"Just look at the country and enjoy yourself, dearest," Agatha told Harry; but his anxious eyes saw the strain on his wife's slender frame as she handled the child, and in a passion of tender care he insisted on taking charge of it himself.

II

At The Hague the mother and child disappeared in the crowd, for which the

young husband gave devout thanks. Agatha was very tired, but now he had her to himself. At the hotel he inquired anxiously if the chambermaid spoke either English or French, and heaved a sigh of relief to learn that whatever woes she might have were impenetrably hidden from Agatha's sympathetic eyes in a thick cloud of Dutch. However, his sweet saint discovered, by some feminine freemasonry, that the girl suffered from sick headaches, and insisted on giving away all her own stock of headache powders, brought from East Orange to ward off the terrible attacks which overcame her from time to time.

Harry did not discover this loss until a week later, in Brussels, when Agatha, pale and racked with suffering, confessed her gentle crime of kindness.

"My dear!" he protested. "Why couldn't you have given her a few of the powders and kept some for yourself?"

"Why, Harry, I shall never see her again. It was my last chance to help her!"

She closed her eyes with an air of resigned endurance which drove the tenderhearted Harry mad with impatient sympathy. None of the medicines he procured from the pharmacists of Brussels helped her, and the long day wore on in a slow agony to him, as he helplessly watched his wife grow paler and paler, and saw lines of pain etch themselves in her forehead. The women of his own family never had headaches, or, if they did, took some medicine that at once relieved them; and he had never seen the luxury of wo that is presented by a woman enjoying a "splitting headache."

He walked up and down the balcony outside their rooms, smoking furiously, cursing the chambermaid in The Hague, and—no, he couldn't blame his wife for being too much of an angel for this world. His feelings were not soothed by the thought that the American consul, a great friend of his, had arranged a garden fête for them that afternoon, where he was to meet some business men with whom he hoped to enter into relations. Not for his own sake did he regret missing this affair; he was quite honest in his feeling about that, but he knew Agatha would have enjoyed it, and his heart swelled to think what a sensation her blond beauty and pretty, vivacious ways would have made.

Toward evening, however, when he stepped into the bedroom and found his wife asleep, all other emotions were swept away in his flood of tender rejoicing that the ordeal of pain was past. As he stood looking at her, lying like a lily in the huge hotel bed, he said to himself that he had never loved her more. The next day the pain had gone, but she was still pale and weak. Harry took her out for a drive, watching with a loving rapture as the color came back to her cheeks.

At a turn of the road they came suddenly upon a singular sight. One of the little Belgian soldiers sat on the edge of the ditch beside the highway, weeping loudly and openly, his thin, dark face twisted into the shamelessly grotesque contortions of a child. "Oh, oh! What can be the matter?" cried Agatha.

Harry's heart went down with an apprehensive plunge, but he obeyed his wife's signal and stopped the carriage beside the absurd and pitiable figure. In the conversation which followed he was totally at a loss, speaking no French, and being unable to follow what seemed to be a most amazing dialogue. The little soldier, a boy as he now appeared, sobbed out some long story, to which Agatha listened, her sweet face glowing with sympathy and pity. When he finished, she seemed to take a sudden resolution. With a guilty look at her husband, which roused his liveliest fears, she entered upon a long and animated speech that left the little soldier quite breathless. He stared at her in incredulity, and then, with a childlike change to elation, he nodded his head a great many times.

"Harry, dear, please give me your purse," Agatha said; and then, in an eager rush, she went on: "Don't say a word to me now. I'll explain later!"

In a profound silence, incredulous on the part of the soldier, exalted on the part of Agatha, and filled with the darkest premonitions on the part of Harry, she counted out six golden napoleons, and with a flood of directions and instructions gave them to her beneficiary, who crossed himself half timorously, as at a miracle.

"I don't wonder he doesn't think it's real!" exclaimed Harry to himself with a grim irony.

The carriage drove on, and Agatha turned to her husband and "explained." It was a bizarre story, bearing on the face of it, to Harry's experienced eyes, the most patent signs of imposture. The fellow's name was Alphonse; he was an orphan, French by parentage, and he had been serving his time of military duty. On his return to his native village, he found a series of dreadful changes. His aunt, with whom he had lived, was dead; the house was sold to strangers; there was no one to welcome him; and, worst and most crushing of all, his sweetheart, his adored Fifi, had deserted him for a wealthy farmer of the neighborhood.

Harry listened to the tale in silence. He was waiting for the sequel, which was quite as bad as he had feared. Agatha had been overcome with sympathy for the lonely, love-sick lad, had been seized with a desire to punish the inconstant Fifi, and had told him that they would take him back to America with them—Harry groaned aloud—and would get him something to do there.

"Why, Harry, he can go steerage, and that doesn't cost *anything!* And you always say that any able-bodied man can earn his living in America—that's the beauty of our dear country; and oh, think what Fifi will feel when he goes back and shows her all that money and tells her he's going to America. You know that's the promised land to them here!"

Harry broke in impatiently.

"You don't suppose for a moment you will ever see him again, do you? You stop on the highway, give money to a total stranger, and imagine he will turn up at a rendezvous six weeks from now! Really, Agatha, I'm sorry to have to speak so decidedly, but we have no money to throw away like that!"

His wife took his hand tenderly in hers.

"You dear, soft-hearted fellow! You talk so sternly and look so fierce I'm almost afraid of you, but all the time I know just as *well*"—this with an infinitely caressing accent—"that you're as pleased to do a good action as I. Just think how you would have felt if you'd come out to East Orange some day and found I was going to be married to somebody else! Why, you're as sorry for poor little Alphonse as I. You dear! Sometimes, Harry darling"—with a soft, pathetic sigh—"I'd almost lose my faith in human nature if it weren't for your kindness and goodness."

III

HARRY'S mouth was effectually closed by this, but his heart burned with wrath as he thought of the shameless Alphonse. That evening they left for Paris, Harry engaging a whole compartment so as to shut Agatha away from the European population, which he felt to be a constant menace to his purse and his peace of mind. In Paris he had a fevered, restless time, trying to keep track of Agatha's spasmodic charities. Their hotel was surrounded by a constantly increasing throng of beneficiaries, and all the money he gave his wife for shopping went to one or another of the barefaced cheats who swarmed about them with threadbare stories of poverty and sorrow.

He rejoiced when Agatha was finally willing to leave the city and go down to a little nook in the Pyrenees, which he had heard was entirely out of the route of general tourist travel. He remembered the words of the man who told them of it:

"A quiet little village, three hundred years behind the times. The only trouble is that they don't talk anything but Basque."

It was the last sentence which decided him in his eager suggestion that he and Agatha should spend the last two weeks of their honeymoon there.

Birogue was all he hoped—quiet, cool, with beautiful walks and bridle-paths, and the only person at their hotel who spoke French was the proprietor. He was a happy, elderly man with a large family, whose round and rosy prosperity repelled all of Agatha's searching shafts of sympathy, persistently as she leveled them at him.

For ten days all went well, and in peace and content without alloy the young American enjoyed his wife's charm and beauty. He had reasoned himself into thinking that he was safe—"quite safe," as he vaguely put it. Out of loyalty to Agatha he was not willing to formulate his meaning more clearly, even to himself. But no retreat is too remote for the hand of Providence. The interruption to their tranquillity came in a grotesquely

unexpected way, but the young man had had enough experience to know his fate when he saw it.

They were riding along a little bridle-path in the foothills near the village, the harsh rattle of the foreign-sounding Basque of a group of river washerwomen still in their ears, when the thunderclap came. To them arrived, breathless and excited, a woman in the garb of the Basque mountaineers, but with the face of an American negro.

"Fo' the Lawd's sake, is you Americans?" she cried in an ecstasy of hope. "After all dis long time has de good Gawd done sent me a deliv'rance from de hands of dese yer heathen?"

Agatha drew rein at once. In her face was surprise unbounded, together with the look of sympathetic interest her husband knew so fatally well. He gave a despairing exclamation, reached for his purse, pressed it into Agatha's hand, and spurred off down the road. He did not need to stay; he knew what would happen. He was scarcely even surprised at the story which Agatha poured out to him on her return to the hotel.

Nancy—her name was Nancy—had been living here for four mortal years, not speaking the language, marooned in desolate isolation among these strange mountaineers. She was a Virginia negro, a lady's-maid, who had come to Europe with an American family. Being obliged to return suddenly to Chicago, they had secured her a position with some Russians; but her new employers had turned out to be frauds and adventurers. They had paid Nancy no wages, and when she grew troublesome they had managed to give her the slip in this out-of-the-way spot, far from the railroad, leaving her penniless and helpless.

"She's earned her living washing! Think, Harry, and she says she can hair-dress beautifully, and manicure, and fix over dresses."

Of course they were to take her back with them to America. Harry received the news in an unsurprised and gloomy silence, only making a rapid mental calculation as to the amount of money he had with him, and reflecting that at least he would not have to pay the fare of that whimpering cry-baby Alphonse, nor that clumsy, lying farmer Greta.

However, when they arrived at the wharf, there were the two unwelcome figures, their faces lighted up with a serene confidence in Agatha. Harry borrowed some money of an acquaintance and bought tickets for them in an exasperation which was terminated by the sight of Agatha's radiant and protecting joy in her absurd charges.

IV

THE passage home was rough, and the young wife kept her cabin. Harry rejoiced to have her quite to himself, and also, half guiltily, to have her out of harm's way. Sometimes he felt the relief one has at knowing that a lunatic is protected from his own vagaries, even though it were a gentle and adored lunatic.

The family met them on the wharf, and after the first outcry of salutations was over, Agatha's brother drew her husband on one side.

"Well?" he said expectantly.

Harry made no answer.

"What did you bring home?" asked the persistent Percy.

Harry looked him straight in the eye, and answered in clear, distinct tones:

"We have brought home one Dutch market-garden woman, one lovesick Belgian soldier, and one lost and strayed American negress from the Pyrenees."

Percy looked immovably grave. He was very fond of Agatha himself, and he would not smile, but once more he said, as he had in the spring:

"Shake, old man!"

There were many times in after years when Harry was proud to remember that he had refused the proffered hand, and had said with an emphasis as unfaltering as before:

"My Agatha is an angel, no less!"

One of these occasions was when he and Percy were joined in a New York restaurant by a mutual friend who had recently dined at the Peabodys' home in East Orange.

"I say, Harry," the other man exclaimed, "I never ate such a dinner as you gave us. Where, in all this mad outcry about the impossibility of keeping servants in the suburbs, did you get such a cook, and how do you keep her?"

"It's not a woman," Harry answered carelessly. "It's a man—a Frenchman

we picked up abroad; comes of a long line of cooks. As for his leaving us, you couldn't drive him away. He worships the ground my wife walks on—just devotes his life to pleasing her."

Again, a year or two later, the president of his company came out to East Orange to visit them. He was an ardent gardener, and was overcome with astonished envy over the Peabodys' small but exquisitely kept grounds.

"Great Scotland, man! How can you afford to pay a gardener to keep things looking so? You must have a professional!"

"Yes," returned Harry gravely; "a Dutch expert—a woman, oddly enough, whom my wife brought home from Holland. She's so fond of Agatha that it's pathetic to see—just follows her around like a dog, and absolutely refuses to take decent wages. Everybody's fond of Agatha, though!"

From the open door he heard his wife explaining:

"Oh, I'm awfully spoiled about house-servants. My second girl, Nancy, always dresses my hair and does my small sewing. She was a lady's-maid before she came to us, and she massages as beautifully as she waits on the table."

Mrs. Percy's voice said wistfully:

"Yes, it's perfectly shameful how she coddles Agatha. She keeps her wrapped up in cotton-wool. And although everybody in East Orange has tried to get her away by every possible inducement, she won't stir. She thinks she belongs to Aggie—doesn't think of anything but new ways to make the household run smoothly."

Harry, listening, smiled and turned to Percy. He thought of his brother-in-law's dreary hours spent in dirty intelligence offices; he thought of the inevitable domestic upheavals which overwhelmed the other couple at irregular intervals; he thought of their hopeless struggle against incompetence and exorbitant demands, and he smiled sympathetically at Agatha's brother.

"Shake, old man!" he said.